AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please amend the specification as shown:

Please delete the paragraph on page 54, lines 8-17 and replace it with the following paragraph:

The assay is run in Corning white half-area 96-well plates (VWR 29444-312 [Corning 3693]) with full-length NS3 HCV protease 1b tethered with NS4A cofactor (final enzyme concentration 1 to 15 nM). The assay buffer is complemented with 10 µM NS4A cofactor Pep 4A (Anaspec 25336 or in-house, MW 1424.8). RET S1 (Ac-Asp-Glu-Asp(EDANS)-Glu-Glu-Abu-[COO]Ala-Ser-Lys-(DABCYL)-NH_2 (SEQ ID NO: 1), AnaSpec 22991, MW 1548.6) is used as the fluorogenic peptide substrate. The assay buffer contained 50 mM Hepes at pH 7.5, 30 mM NaCl and 10 mM BME. The enzyme reaction is followed over a 30 minutes time course at room temperature in the absence and presence of inhibitors.

Please delete the paragraph on page 54, lines 19-21 and replace it with the following paragraph:

The peptide inhibitors HCV Inh 1 (Anaspec 25345, MW 796.8) Ac-Asp-Glu-Met-Glu-Glu-Cys-OH (SEQ ID NO: 2), [-20^{0}C] and HCV Inh 2 (Anaspec 25346, MW 913.1) Ac-Asp-Glu-Dif-Cha-Cys-OH (SEQ ID NO: 3), were used as reference compounds.

Please delete the paragraph on page 55, lines 7-10 and replace it with the following paragraph:

- HCV Forward primer "RBNS5bfor"
  - 5'GCTGCGGCCTGTCGAGCT (SEQ ID NO: 4):
- HCV Reverse primer "RBNS5Brev":
  - 5'CAAGGTCGTCTCCGCATAC (SEQ ID NO: 5)

Please delete the paragraph on page 55, lines 27-30 and replace it with the following paragraph:

The RT-PCR product was detected using the following labeled probe:

- 5' FAM-CGAAGCTCCAGGACTGCACGATGCT-TAMRA (SEQ ID NO: 6)
- FAM= Fluorescence reporter dye.

TAMRA:=Quencher dye.

After page 57, please insert the "Sequence Listing" on the following three (3) pages.